



the Fairest One of All

THE MAKING OF WALT DISNEY'S SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

J. B. Kaufman 🍷 Foreword by Diane Disney Miller



THE
FAIREST
ONE OF ALL

J.B. KAUFMAN



To little Joan and little Gretchen,
who watched *Snow White*
three times in one day
in 1938



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A Queen, beautiful but wicked and vain, learns from her magic mirror that her own stepdaughter, Snow White, is more beautiful than she. Summoning her Huntsman, the Queen sends him into the forest with Snow White, giving him instructions to kill the girl there. The Huntsman cannot bring himself to carry out this order, and Snow White runs away into the deep forest, where she finds refuge with seven dwarfs. Learning that Snow White is still alive, the Queen disguises herself and seeks out the dwarfs' cottage. She makes several attempts on the girl's life and finally tricks her into eating a poisoned apple. Snow White seems to have died, and the dwarfs mourn their beloved princess. But when a prince finds her still form and falls in love with her, it is revealed that Snow White did not die after all. She is revived and marries the prince.

1

THE BIRTH OF THE TALE

No one knows exactly where or when the story of “Snow White” originated. Today we tend to associate the story with the Brothers Grimm—but the Grimms were not creators so much as collectors. Their publication of “Sneewittchen” in 1812 was meant simply to preserve a traditional German folk tale for posterity. In truth, elements of the “Snow White” story had been deeply rooted in the Grimms’ culture, and in many others, for centuries before that. One of the earliest written versions, “La schiavottella” (“The Young Slave”) by Giambattista Basile, was published in Italy in the 1630s, predating the Grimms’ version by nearly 200 years. “The Young Slave” is a heartrending tale of a lovely young orphaned girl whose life is apparently cut short by a fairy’s curse. By a cruel twist of fate, she is freed from this artificial death only to be cast into a living hell at the hands of her bitterly jealous aunt, who beats her, enslaves her, and denies her any scrap of comfort or kindness. In despair, the girl is at the point of suicide when her plight finally comes to her uncle’s attention. He rescues her and drives the aunt away, and the girl is finally restored to her rightful place. There is magic and enchantment in this story, but no seven dwarfs, and precious little happiness. Like many traditional fairy tales, it takes place in a very dark world.

Basile’s story was not itself an original composition, but a story passed down through an already long-standing oral tradition. Similar tales abounded in other European cultures, and had done so for centuries, many of them probably generated independently of one another in a process that folklorists call *polygenesis*. Basile was simply one of the earliest writers to record these stories in written

form. As time passed, other writers in Italy and elsewhere began to publish similar collections of folk tales. Later in the seventeenth century a literary fairy-tale tradition began to flourish in France, in the hands of such writers as Charles Perrault. Other cultures made contributions of their own, and soon the literary fairy tale was an established genre, preserving a wide variety of regional traditions for future generations, even as they influenced each other. By the time Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm came to record their stories in the early 1800s, they came as academics seeking to add their country’s voice to a widespread and diverse institution.

The Grimms saw themselves as scholars charged with preserving the cultural history of their beloved native Germany, in part as a mild form of resistance against the current Napoleonic occupation. Their collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children’s and Household Tales*), published in two volumes in 1812 and 1814 (the second volume dated 1815), was not a children’s storybook but a scholarly anthology of traditional German folktales, complete with notes on distribution patterns and variant versions of the stories. The tale of “Sneewittchen,”¹ included in the first volume in 1812, was related to the Grimms by two sisters in Cassel. This cultural variant retained the same core element that had driven Basile’s story—an older woman’s murderous jealousy of the heroine’s beauty—but added distinctive elements of its own. The Queen’s mirror, a symbol of her vanity, became also the oracle that informed her of the still greater beauty of Snow White. The deep forest into which Snow White escaped was a natural feature of Germany’s topography, and the dwarfs with whom she



The Grimms’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, originally published as a scholarly anthology, found new popularity as a children’s storybook.

¹ D.L. Ashliman points out that “Sneewittchen,” meaning “Little Snow White,” is a compound word derived from Low German, although the Grimms published the tale itself in High German. The High German translation of the heroine’s name is “Schneeweißchen.”

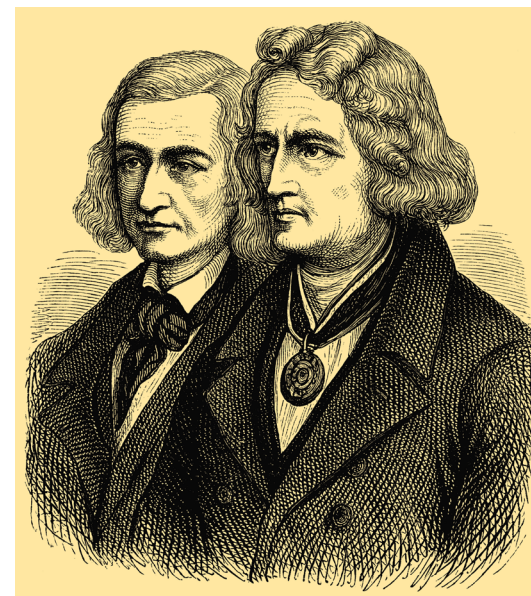
sought refuge were cousins to the dwarfs who appeared in other German stories collected by the Grimms. That there were seven of them was also characteristic: the number seven, symbolizing fullness or completeness, was a significant number that cropped up elsewhere in the Grimms' tales—as here, where the disguised queen travels “beyond the seven hills” to reach the dwarfs' cottage.² The poisoned apple in this version was not actually ingested by Snow White. Instead a piece of it lodged in her throat, and she *seemed* to have died; later, when the morsel was dislodged, she instantly recovered.

Intentionally or not, the Grimms' collection of stories became widely popular with family audiences and prompted a demand for further editions. Wilhelm Grimm, the younger of the two brothers, happily obliged. A natural storyteller in his own right, Grimm was quick to see that the published stories had found a large and unexpected audience and shrewd enough to adapt them to that audience. In his subsequent editions of the fairy tales, the scholarly notes were banished to a separate volume or eliminated altogether, and the stories themselves were increasingly retailored for children and their parents. In the original 1812 publication of “Sneewittchen,” as in the oral version related to the Grimms, the jealous Queen who tries to kill Snow White is the girl's own mother! For the second edition in 1819, Grimm rewrote the beginning of the story so that the mother died, the father remarried, and the villainess became Snow White's stepmother. Other elements of the story were similarly softened as “Sneewittchen” worked its way through successive editions.

The popularity of “Sneewittchen” and the Grimms' other stories was not confined to Germany; translations quickly began to appear in other countries. An English translation, “Snow-Drop,” was published in England as early as 1823; this was followed by a specifically British variant, “Snow-White,” which retained much of the Grimms' basic plot but replaced the seven dwarfs with three robbers and ended with the wicked Queen roasted in a brick kiln. Many of the other cultural variants likewise used robbers in place of the dwarfs. In Italy, whose folklore seldom featured dwarfs, their place in the story was taken by robbers (“Bella Venezia” and “Maria, the Wicked Stepmother, and the Seven Robbers”), fairies (“The Crystal Casket” and “A Tuscan Snow-White”),

an ogre and his wife (“The Beautiful Anna”), or even the moon (“Giricoccola”), while in other versions the dwarfs had no counterpart at all. In at least one case, the dwarfs branched off into a grisly story of their own: the unnamed Snow White is merely a supporting character in the Swiss tale “Death of the Seven Dwarfs,” which concentrates on a wicked peasant woman's visit to the dwarfs' cottage, their refusal to give up their fair visitor, and the woman's return with two henchmen who ruthlessly slaughter the dwarfs and burn their cottage to the ground! In other variations the stepmother became neither a peasant nor a queen, but an innkeeper or a schoolteacher. The Italian “Bella Venezia” and the Scottish “Gold-Tree and Silver-Tree,” like the Grimms' original edition, cast the girl's own mother as the villainess, while in other stories like “Giricoccola” or the Greek “Myrsina, or Myrtle,” the girl's life was sought by her jealous sisters. In two Celtic variants, “Gold-Tree and Silver-Tree” and “Lasair Gheug, the King of Ireland's Daughter,” the Queen's magic mirror was replaced by a talking trout. All in all, by the end of the nineteenth century there were literally hundreds of published variants of the “Snow White” story, many of them no doubt enriched by cross-fertilization.

Nevertheless—despite the multitude of variant versions, despite the long oral tradition that preceded the Grimms, despite the considerable variations even within the Grimms' own versions of the story—the Brothers Grimm had established a proprietary hold on the story of “Snow White.” Their version, or one of their versions, came to be regarded as the definitive standard. Something about their combination of themes touched a universal chord, underlying all the cultural variations, to give their “Snow White” a potent staying power; as Maria Tatar comments, “it has remained one of our most powerful cultural stories.” In the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index *The Types of International Folktales*, universally accepted as the definitive index for students of folklore, “Snow White” was codified as tale type 709, with a list of motifs—the cruel stepmother, the compassionate executioner, the seven dwarfs, the poisoned apple, the glass coffin, and others—all of which were drawn from the Grimms' story, and any or all of which might be found, sometimes with variations, in any of the hundreds of other related stories in the same category.³



An engraving of the Brothers Grimm: Wilhelm (left) and Jacob (right).

² This is one of the devices retained in the Disney film: the magic mirror, queried by the Queen, tells her that “over the seven jeweled hills, beyond the seventh fall, in the cottage of the Seven Dwarfs,” Snow White still lives.

³ It's worth noting that “Snow White,” as a spoken or written tale, has continued to maintain an active life of its own independently of stage and film adaptations. Maria Tatar, in *The Classic Fairy Tales*, cites variant analyses extending well into the late twentieth century, including such feminist interpretations as that of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, published by Yale University Press in 1979.



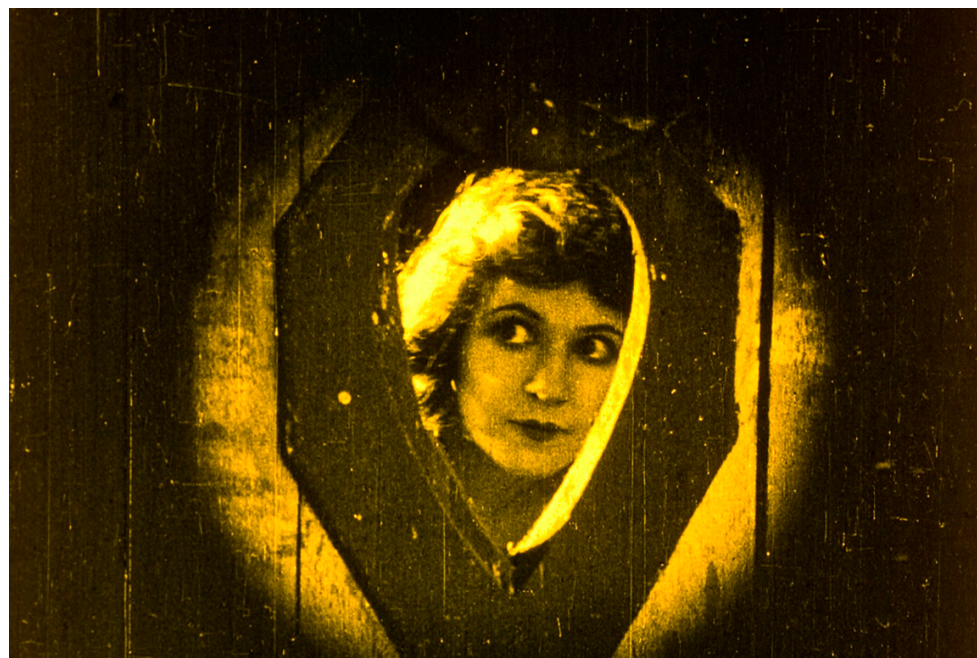
Marguerite Clark, as Snow White, makes her way through the Georgia woods in the 1916 Paramount film.

Ames himself consulted with director J. Searle Dawley in adapting the story for the screen, and the interiors were filmed at Famous Players' New York studio. Nevertheless, the resulting film was anything but "filmed theater." The story, as successively adapted three times for the stage, was again modified for the film and new episodes were added, some of them taking full advantage of the magical effects offered by the movies. One was prompted by the planned Christmastime release: in a prologue, Santa Claus makes his nocturnal visit to one household and arranges a row of dolls on a table. The dolls come to life and become the characters in *Snow White*. The film's exteriors were filmed in the woods in Georgia, near Savannah, and the picturesque scenes of moss hanging from the trees occasioned much comment from critics. Aside from Marguerite Clark, none of the original stage cast appeared in the film, and some of the key players who did appear would go on to distinguished careers in the movies after 1916. (Creighton Hale, who played Prince Florimond, was just beginning what would become a prolific film career that lasted well into the 1950s. Today he is perhaps best remembered for his character roles in such silents as *The Cat and the Canary* and Griffith's *Way Down East*. The Australian actress Dorothy Cumming, who appeared as

Queen Brangomar, likewise went on to many other film roles, among them the malicious wife in MGM's 1928 production *The Wind*.)

Upon its Christmas 1916 release, *Snow White* was hailed as a delight. "Grown people will enjoy this play fully as much as the children," predicted *Motion Picture News*, "and we know the children will just rave about it." Other trade papers concurred, praising both the film and Marguerite Clark's performance in it. "*Snow White* is a remarkable picture," declared *Moving Picture World* in words that seem oddly prescient in hindsight, "remarkable for the way it establishes illusion, for the way it makes the unreal seem real, for its pictorial quality, and for its real drama, which will hold and move the adult as it will the child."

In the winter of 1916–17, when the film was released, Walt Disney was living with his family in Kansas City and had just celebrated his fifteenth birthday. *Snow White* opened in Kansas City on 26 December 1916 and enjoyed the usual first-run engagement at the Royal Theater, ending its run on New Year's Day 1917. But then it returned in a far more spectacular way. The *Kansas City Star*, the city's leading newspaper, announced early in January 1917 that it was sponsoring a "movie party" later in the month. The event would be



Scenes from the Paramount film. At left: Snow White with the Brown Bird. At right: Snow White peers into the dwarfs' cottage in a striking pictorial composition. A similar scene would later appear in the Disney film; see page 127.

held at the city's 12,000-seat Convention Hall, and no admission would be charged. Everyone in Kansas City was invited to attend. The film would be *Snow White*.

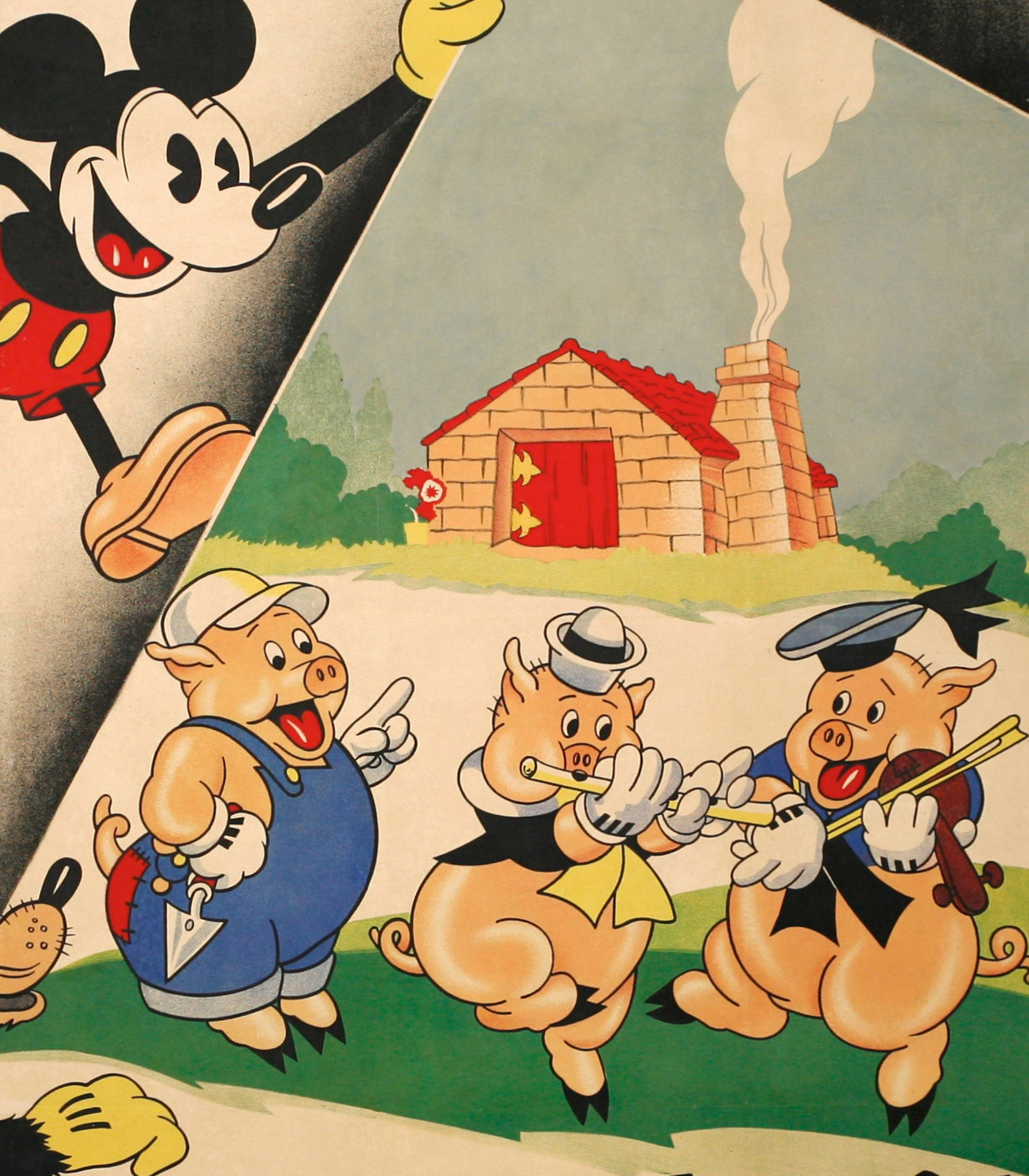
The *Star*'s movie party, held on the 27th and 28th of January 1917, was a remarkable occasion in its own right. To accommodate the crowds and to ensure that everyone in the house could see the picture, an elaborate four-sided screen was suspended in the center of the huge hall, level with the balcony seats. Four pairs of projectors, all at varying distances from their respective screens, projected *Snow White* simultaneously from the four corners of Convention Hall, and a makeshift bell system was installed so that the team of projectionists could coordinate their changeovers between reels. On a platform directly below the screens in the center of the hall, a 35-piece orchestra accompanied the film. (The musical score was compiled, and the orchestra conducted, by the Royal Theater's musical director Leo Forbstein, who would later become head of the Warner Bros. music department during the sound-film era. In addition, the *Snow White* event was coordinated by the manager of the Royal, Frank L. Newman—coincidentally the man for whom Walt Disney would produce his first series of theatrical films, the *Newman Laugh-O-grams*, just a few years later.)

By all accounts, the *Snow White* movie party was a huge success. THEY CAME IN THOUSANDS, exulted a headline in the *Star*. The nominal seating capacity of Convention Hall was 12,000, but many of the smaller children sat two to a seat, and adults availed themselves of standing room. At the close of the weekend, after five showings in the course of two days, the *Star* estimated that a combined audience of 67,000 had seen the film.

Word of this extraordinary exhibition reached the Paramount offices in New York before the weekend was out, and both Marguerite Clark and Adolph Zukor sent telegrams of congratulations and thanks. The singular nature of the event seems remarkable even today; no less an authority than Kevin Brownlow describes it as "one of the most astonishing presentations in silent film history."

Small wonder that *Snow White* had a strong impact on 15-year-old Walt! "My impression of the picture stayed with me through the years, and I know it played a big part in my selecting *Snow White* for my first feature production," he wrote in 1938 to Frank Newman. "From the spot where I viewed the picture I was able to watch two screens at the same time." When two of the projectors got slightly out of sync, "I could look at one screen and tell what was going to happen on the next. I remember the show very well, and I am sure it will remain a vivid reality with me the rest of my life."

But after its initial run, the Paramount *Snow White* was gradually forgotten, and by the end of the silent era it was apparently a lost film. We have no indication that the Disney staff had access to it even during their own *Snow White* story conferences in the 1930s. For decades the film's influence on Walt remained a tantalizing footnote in history; writers and historians were forced to rely on written accounts and their own speculation. Then, in 1992, a tinted and toned 35mm nitrate release print surfaced in the collection of the Nederlands Filmmuseum in Amsterdam. The film was sent to George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. There, in 1994, a team of restoration experts led by Ed Stratmann and Philip Carli worked to produce a preservation print, carefully preserving the color effects and reconstructing English



3

A NEW CHALLENGE

“As far as I can say,” Walt Disney later recalled, “the whole idea of making this feature crystallized in 1933.”

In the spring of 1933, the effective center of the animation world was a small studio at Hyperion Avenue and Griffith Park Boulevard in Hollywood. There, in the course of a few short years, Walt Disney had gone a long way toward revolutionizing the animated cartoon, and in the process had become a world celebrity. Beginning with the success of Mickey Mouse in 1928–29 and continuing through the introduction of the Silly Symphonies—first in black and white, then in vibrant new Technicolor—he had produced a series of fresh, exciting, delightful animated cartoons that had caught the attention of the world. New innovations, it seemed, sprang from his imagination on a daily basis. His latest triumph was *Three Little Pigs*, released in May 1933, which quickly achieved a sensational popularity all its own.

It was around this time that Walt was approached by Mary Pickford with a proposal for a novel new project. Pickford was one of the biggest movie stars in the business as well as a founding partner in United Artists, the company that was then distributing Walt’s cartoons. She was also a great admirer of his work, and now she proposed a feature-length production of *Alice in Wonderland*, a combination of live action and animation, with herself in the role of Alice and the inhabitants of Wonderland animated by the Disney studio. Walt corresponded with her, registering cautious enthusiasm for her idea, but ultimately backed away from the

project—which was thwarted anyway by Paramount’s production of its own live-action version of *Alice*.

Still, it was a short leap from the Pickford *Alice* idea to the idea of a completely animated feature-length film, produced in its entirety by the Disney studio. This was just the kind of challenge that Walt thrived on. By late July 1933, a scant two months after abandoning the *Alice* project, he was in New York speaking publicly of his intention to produce a feature. “Disney has plans worked out for a feature-length cartoon picture,” reported *Film Daily*, “but has been unable to find response from United Artists executives, he said.”

But, a later publicity item explained, Walt “didn’t call his staff together and announce, ‘Boys, we’re going to make a feature.’ He introduced the idea by the method of slow infiltration. He dropped it on everyone individually in the midst of casual conversations.”

The reaction was enthusiastic. The Walt Disney studio in the early 1930s was a bustling, exhilarating wellspring of creativity, and Walt’s artists were as excited as he was about the new possibilities of animation and about this fresh challenge. As early as May 1933, studio artist Ferdinand Horvath was writing eagerly to his wife with the news. In November, animator Art Babbitt wrote to his friend Bill Tytla: “We’re definitely going ahead with a feature-length cartoon in color—they’re planning the building for it now . . . Walt has promised me a big hunk of the picture.” (Heeding Babbitt’s exhortations, Tytla would soon move to California and join the Disney staff, and would become one of the stellar artists behind

Walt presides over a story meeting for the Silly Symphony *Grasshopper and the Ants*. Left to right: Webb Smith, Bill Cottrell, Ted Sears, Walt, Pinto Colvig, Harry Reeves, and Albert Hurter. This photo was taken in the autumn of 1933; every artist in this shot went on to work on *Snow White*.

Opposite: Walt's discovery of this all-Disney program at a Paris theater in 1935 helped reinforce his determination to produce a feature.



story came to a virtual standstill while he reconsidered his production method. In the mid-1930s a standard system had evolved at the Disney studio: each cartoon short was supervised by a director who was in turn supervised by Walt. By 1935 Wilfred Jackson, Dave Hand, and Ben Sharpsteen had established themselves as the top Disney directors. Each of the three brought a personal touch to the films he directed—Jackson, for example, had a musical background that was manifested in brilliant musical gags in his cartoons—but none was a true *auteur* because all the films were subject to the personal stamp of Walt himself. In the case of *Snow White*, it was originally assumed that Walt would direct the feature personally.

Early in 1934, Walt assumed personal direction of one of the shorts: *The Golden Touch*, a Silly Symphony retelling the story of King Midas. Generally understood as a trial run for Walt's direction of the feature, *The Golden Touch* proceeded slowly through production for a good nine months, from June 1934 to February 1935. By that time it was painfully clear that this short—directed by Walt Disney himself, and animated by two of the best artists in the studio, Fred Moore and Norm Ferguson—was not a very good film. “With the best men and the best brain in the business . . .” said Dick Huemer to historian Joe Adamson, “the picture was not funny, it wasn’t convincing, you weren’t with it—it just wasn’t there. And he had to admit it himself. Now, isn’t

that a funny thing?” Seen today, *The Golden Touch*, like other perceived Disney “failures” of the time, is a much better film than its reputation would suggest. But it’s clearly not one of the best Disney pictures of its time, and in 1935 it was regarded as an outright embarrassment. Under the circumstances—and considering the difficulty the animators were still having with convincing human movement, a difficulty we’ll observe shortly—it’s hardly surprising that Walt decided to pause and rethink his approach to the much more consequential production of *Snow White*.

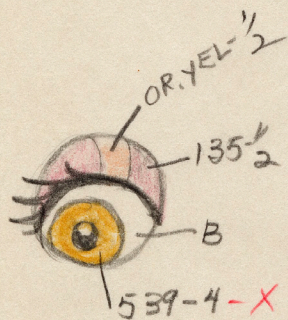
The summer of 1935 brought another interruption: a vacation trip to Europe by Walt, his brother Roy (also the business manager of the studio), and their wives. For three months Walt simply wasn’t at the studio, and while he made advance arrangements to keep production going on the shorts during his absence, production of *Snow White* was an uncharted process that would simply have to wait for his return. However, the European trip served to fortify Walt’s plans in an unexpected way: in Paris he found a movie theater whose entire program was made up of Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphony shorts. “[They were] putting five or six of these things together and running them,” Walt told interviewer Pete Martin in later years. This all-Disney program had been showing in Paris since the previous year and had already inspired at least one all-cartoon theater in the United States.¹⁴ If Walt had entertained any doubts about *Snow White*, this

¹⁴ New York’s Bijou Theatre had opened in the autumn of 1934, featuring a steady diet of Disney cartoons but also including a ration of Fleischer and Lantz shorts.

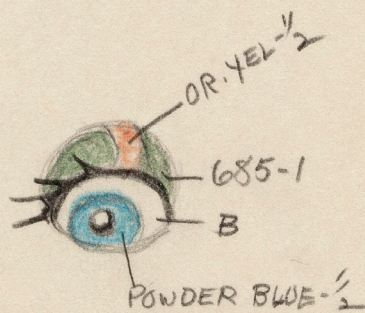


TWO SETS OF EYES ON SEPERATE CELS -

TEST-B

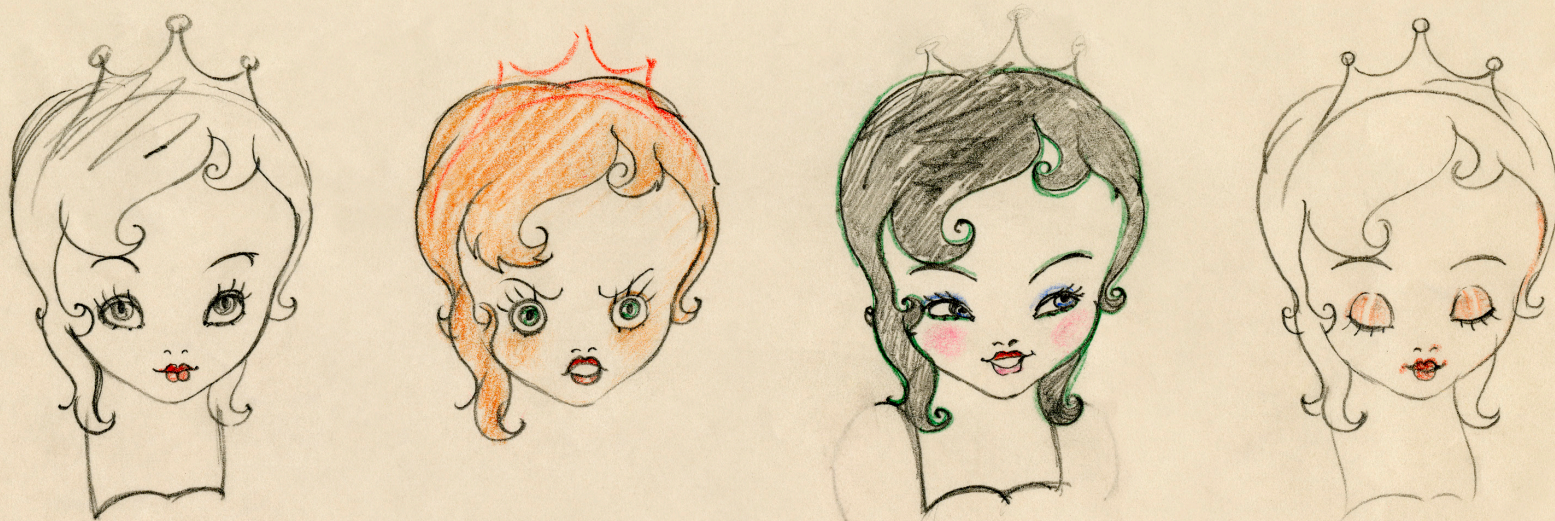


TEST-C



TEST MODEL
SEP-30- SC26B

F.C. 60
(RETANE)



Above and opposite: Grim Natwick's exploratory sketches displayed charm and femininity but were still far more cartoony than the final version of Snow White.

¹⁷ Harry Bailey's "Routine Procedure on Feature Production," undated but written in 1935, makes specific provision for "stage settings, sets, props, costumes . . . make-up men, camera men, electricians, [and] carpenters." Roy Disney, dealing with the ongoing problem of constant studio expansion, reported to Walt in August 1935 on the possible use of a vacant building across the street. The building, Roy wrote, had some structural weaknesses, but the second floor might be used for "the building of the *Snow White* sets."

¹⁸ These sentiments became deep-rooted among the Disney animators. This writer can testify that, 50 years later, some of them still bristled with indignation at the very mention of the word "rotoscope."

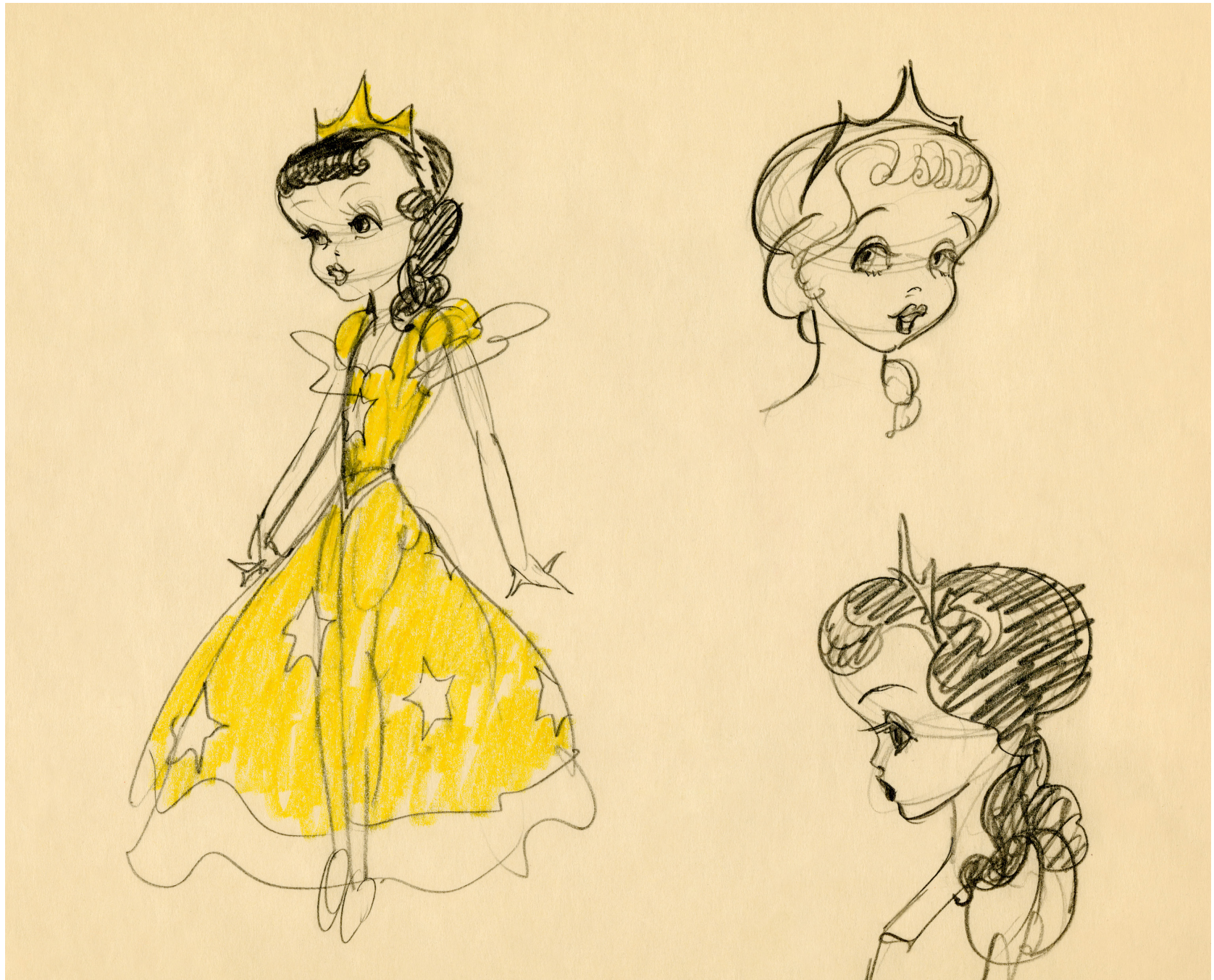
could never have carried a feature-length story.

In November 1935, Walt issued a six-page memo naming the animators he had chosen to assign to the feature. He opened by announcing the artist he would entrust with the title character: "From now on, *Ham Luske* is definitely assigned to *Snow White*." Luske would be the first animator to start work, and he would work almost exclusively on Snow White herself. Walt outlined a long list of sequences assigned to him, as well as a corps of assistants to help him. Luske was the same artist who had animated the principal scenes of the *Pied Piper* as well as *Persephone's* dance, two perceived failures. But these were two isolated and unusually demanding cases; Luske also had a string of brilliantly animated characters to his credit. Moreover, he had the analytical capacity to learn from his experiences with *Persephone* and the *Piper*. Former coworkers remembered Luske as an artist with little natural facility, who struggled to achieve his results—but, in the end, those struggles paid off. His work on *Snow White* is an enduring testimony. During the two years following Walt's memo, Luske played a unique role in the making of *Snow White*: animating many key scenes himself, supervising a large unit of other animators, controlling virtually every appearance of Snow White as well as the animals and birds that surrounded her. Operating independently of the nominal sequence directors, Luske enjoyed an autonomy second only to that of Walt himself.

The first order of business, of course, was to design the character. By now it had been generally agreed that *Persephone*, the *Flying Mouse's* fairy, and the other

preceding girl characters had suffered a common problem: they were designed according to the realistic proportions of adult human beings—proportions that did not lend themselves well to animation. In designing Snow White, Luske went to the opposite extreme. Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston have reported that Luske suggested a Snow White who looked like an awkward, gangly teenage girl, a Snow White whose charm would be largely comic. Such a character would have been relatively easy to animate. Albert Hurter and other artists modified this concept, designing Snow Whites who were prettier and daintier but still largely cartoon-like. The Snow White who finally appeared in the film was a compromise: superficially conforming to the "pretty girl" pattern of her predecessors, but designed for animation, with a head much larger than normal and her other proportions similarly modified.

To create lifelike movements for this character, it was now conceded that the studio would have to fall back on live action. Studio documents indicate that live-action filming figured in the plans for *Snow White* at an early date, well before Walt's November 1935 memo.¹⁷ Accordingly, Luske and his fellow artists resorted to the rotoscope—but not in the way Max Fleischer had used it in 1915. By the mid-1930s, in fact, traditional rotoscoping was scorned at the Disney studio. Immersed in the study of movement and proud of their increasing ability to represent it on the screen, the Disney artists were quick to take offense at any hint that they might use such a crutch as simple tracing.¹⁸ But a different use was found for the rotoscope. An actress would be filmed



playing the role of Snow White, and the resulting film would be traced, frame by frame, just as Fleischer had traced his film two decades earlier. But these tracings were not for production. Instead they were given to the animator as a *guide* for production. The animator of the finished scene was under no obligation to reproduce every wrinkle in the girl's dress as she walked or danced, but he had an opportunity to analyze the *essence* of her movement—the swing of a leg, the turn of her head—and, at his discretion, incorporate those isolated actions into his animation. That extra layer of drawings between rotoscope and screen allowed the animator to retain all the advantages of live action, with none of the disadvan-

tages: recognizable human action could be applied *selectively* to a character designed for animation. At long last, the Disney artists had found a solution to the seemingly insurmountable problem of representing lifelike human action in an animated character.

The job of making those rotoscope tracings initially fell to Australian-born Kendall O'Connor. Soon enough O'Connor would become a respected layout artist, but in 1935 he was a relative newcomer to the studio, and now he found himself saddled with the rotoscope work for *Snow White*. He didn't relish the prospect. "You know," he explained, "you're in there eight hours a day in a black room, no light except what's

THE SEVEN DWARFS

If Snow White represented one kind of challenge for the animators, the other title characters, the Seven Dwarfs, represented a challenge of a different kind.

The idea of casting the dwarfs as seven different personality types, identified by their names, was not a revelation that occurred in the course of production; it was embedded in Walt Disney's concept of the film from the very beginning. As we've seen, earlier stage and film adaptations of the story had sometimes included slight differentiation of *some* of the dwarfs. By contrast, the earliest surviving story outlines of the Disney version, from mid-1934, are based on the idea of differentiating *all* the dwarfs by strong personality types. This concept—sometimes criticized by folklore purists as if it were a flaw in the film—actually stemmed from the nature of character animation at the Disney studio during those peak years and was central to Walt's reasons for producing *Snow White* in the first place.

The wonderful explosion of creativity that emerged from the Disney studio in the 1930s has been rightly celebrated, but viewers, then and now, have often failed to understand the heart of Disney's breakthrough: *personality animation*. If the characters in Disney cartoons were suddenly reaching out and endearing themselves to audiences as no other animated characters had ever done, it was because they projected convincing, appealing personalities. This was no accident; it was the result of well-conceived story situations, the design of the characters, and—most important of all—the way the characters *moved*. The phenomenally popular *Three Little Pigs* (1933) gained much of its appeal from its chubby, jolly little pigs, bouncing around in vivid contrast to the movements of the stealthy, sly (but none-too-bright) Big Bad Wolf. *The Tortoise and the Hare* (1934) offered not only a compelling story but also a cocky Hare who zipped in circles around the lumbering, slow-witted, good-natured Tortoise. Pluto, the dog in the Mickey Mouse series, distinguished himself by his lanky, loose-limbed movement and by his facial expressions, which seemed to convey his laborious thought processes to the audience. This craft of personality animation was, in effect, a new art form, which would reach its zenith at the Disney studio during the

1930s and early 1940s. It was notoriously difficult to master, but certain artists—Fred Moore, Ham Luske, Norm Ferguson, Bill Tytla, Art Babbitt, and a few others—had shown a special facility for it and had become the new “stars” of the studio.

As characters, the Seven Dwarfs were tailor-made for this artistic environment. If ever there was a textbook exercise in personality animation, this was it: seven characters, all of similar height and appearance, who must be designed and animated so that they could instantly be distinguished from each other. And, since earlier versions of the story had rarely bothered to single out any of the individual dwarfs, the Disney artists were essentially starting from scratch. It was an inspiring challenge. “Just think,” Dick Huemer commented to historian Joe Adamson, “taking each one of those dwarfs and making each one an entirely different personality. Seven of the little bastards! It was just unheard of!”²³ In a sense, the dwarfs are the key to the picture: integral to the Grimms' story, ideally suited to development in Disney's medium. It's in this perfect meshing of story and form that the Disney *Snow White* finds its focus.

One of the early challenges in designing these characters was to determine whether, and to what extent, the dwarfs should resemble real dwarfs. One of the earliest story meetings resulted in a warning directed to all the writers: “CALL THEM SEVEN LITTLE MEN, *NOT* DWARFS.” (This policy was maintained throughout production; the word “dwarfs,” inherited from the Grimms, remained in the film's title, but within the film itself the characters are usually referred to as “little men.”) In 1936, several genuine dwarfs were brought to the studio and filmed in 16mm to see whether the animators could make use of their movements. Any suggestion of deformity would of course be a touchy issue with these characters, but Walt and the artists sought creative ways to suggest the characteristics of real dwarfs. What would be the proportions of their limbs? Would they walk in a manner that reflected the pelvic structure of dwarfs?²⁴ Some early dwarf sketches, particularly those of Albert Hurter, suggested a precarious balance between grotesqueness and charm, but the challenge of putting these ideas in motion—without

²³ For the record, Huemer was animating at the Disney studio during the time *Snow White* was in production, but he worked on only one section of the feature: sequence 11B, the Bed-Building sequence, which was subsequently cut from the picture.

²⁴ Dave Hand made a mildly tactless remark at one meeting: “I think a duck is an excellent basic thing to build from. As the duck walks along, he waddles from side to side.”



A wide range of design possibilities were suggested for the Dwarfs.

giving offense or distracting the audience from the story at hand—proved too daunting. Walt continued to hold out for some kind of distinctive traits; as late as December 1936 he was urging shorter arms and legs for Dopey—“one of these characters has to look like a dwarf.” In the end, however, any troublesome characteristics were smoothed away, and the Seven Dwarfs remained, simply, seven little men.

A GALLERY OF DWARFS

Beginning in 1934, more than fifty names, with their corresponding character types, were suggested for the dwarfs. Many of these were quickly discarded; some were considered for a time and then dropped. It’s fascinating to review some of the rejected dwarfs through hindsight, not least because some of their traits were developed, refined, and ultimately distilled into the personalities of the dwarfs that did remain in the picture.

Jumpy Sometimes also known as Hoppy, Jumpy was a nervous, easily excitable individual. As we’ll see, many of the dwarfs were designed to be voiced by popular radio comedians—and, as we’ll also see, several of them were inclined to get their words mixed up, a popular gimmick for radio comics in the 1930s. Jumpy was designed with comic Joe Twerp in mind, and like his role model would emit a high-speed stream of chatter, barely intelligible because of his constant spoonerisms.²⁵ His nervousness took a colorful form: he was constantly in fear of being goosed. “Whenever he hears a noise behind him or senses someone walking behind him,” the 1934 “Manuscript” suggested, “he starts and his hand automatically protects his fanny. He is also exceedingly ticklish.” Jumpy flourished briefly during 1934, his phobia surfacing in one treatment as the dwarfs search their house for an intruder: when the teakettle hisses behind him, “JUMPY leaps high into the air, with

²⁵ Joe Twerp, real name Joe Boyes, was primarily a radio comic but also worked occasionally as a writer and performer in motion pictures. He died in 1980.



a scream!" By mid-November 1934 he had disappeared from the lineup. But it's worth noting that at least one small vestige of his character remained in the finished film. During the Entertainment sequence, as the dwarfs take turns singing their song, Grumpy sounds a loud warning chord on the organ—and Bashful does a quick, involuntary "goose take" as he launches into his verse.

Fatty Also known as Chubby, this dwarf was suggested very early in story development but didn't last long. One early document described him as "a fat little red-nosed dwarf with nice white whiskers, good natured, a twinkle in his eye. Every time he laughs his belly shakes." His pleasant disposition was merged into the character of Happy, as was his ample girth.

Biggy-Wiggy/Biggo-Ego This self-important dwarf was described as "a pompous, oily tongued, know-it-all." Constantly feigning an air of superiority, Biggo-Ego was actually a cowardly, lazy blowhard. The other dwarfs were never fooled in the slightest by his pretensions, but shouted him down and tolerated him only with difficulty. This character, too, was to be voiced by a radio comedian, in this case "Eddie Holden in his character of Hipplewater."²⁶ It was suggested that Biggo-Ego would eventually redeem himself by performing some act of self-sacrifice for Snow White, but this extremely unpleasant dwarf was not destined to remain in the story for long. Some of his pomposity would later be absorbed by the character of Doc.

Ferdinand Horvath suggests a distinctive basic model for the Dwarfs, and several alternate versions of Dopey.

²⁶ At this time Holden was already known at the studio, having just supplied the voice for Toby Tortoise in *The Tortoise and the Hare*.







Two story sketches for the Huntsman sequence.

the rise of expressionism in cinema is generally traced to the German horror film *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), which had boldly translated the work of the Expressionist painters into cinematic terms. The impact of *Caligari* had quickly spread to other German films, then to American films as well, as many of the German directors and cameramen emigrated to Hollywood. By the late 1920s, the dark visual magic of these stylists had permeated much of Hollywood cinema. Even as late as 1935, so American a director as John Ford was employing a strongly expressionist style in *The Informer*. Considering this prevailing influence—and considering the strong Old World influence of some of the Disney artists, not to mention the Germanic roots of the “Snow White” story itself—it’s hardly surprising that expressionist techniques were used to project Snow White’s terror in the forest onto her surroundings.

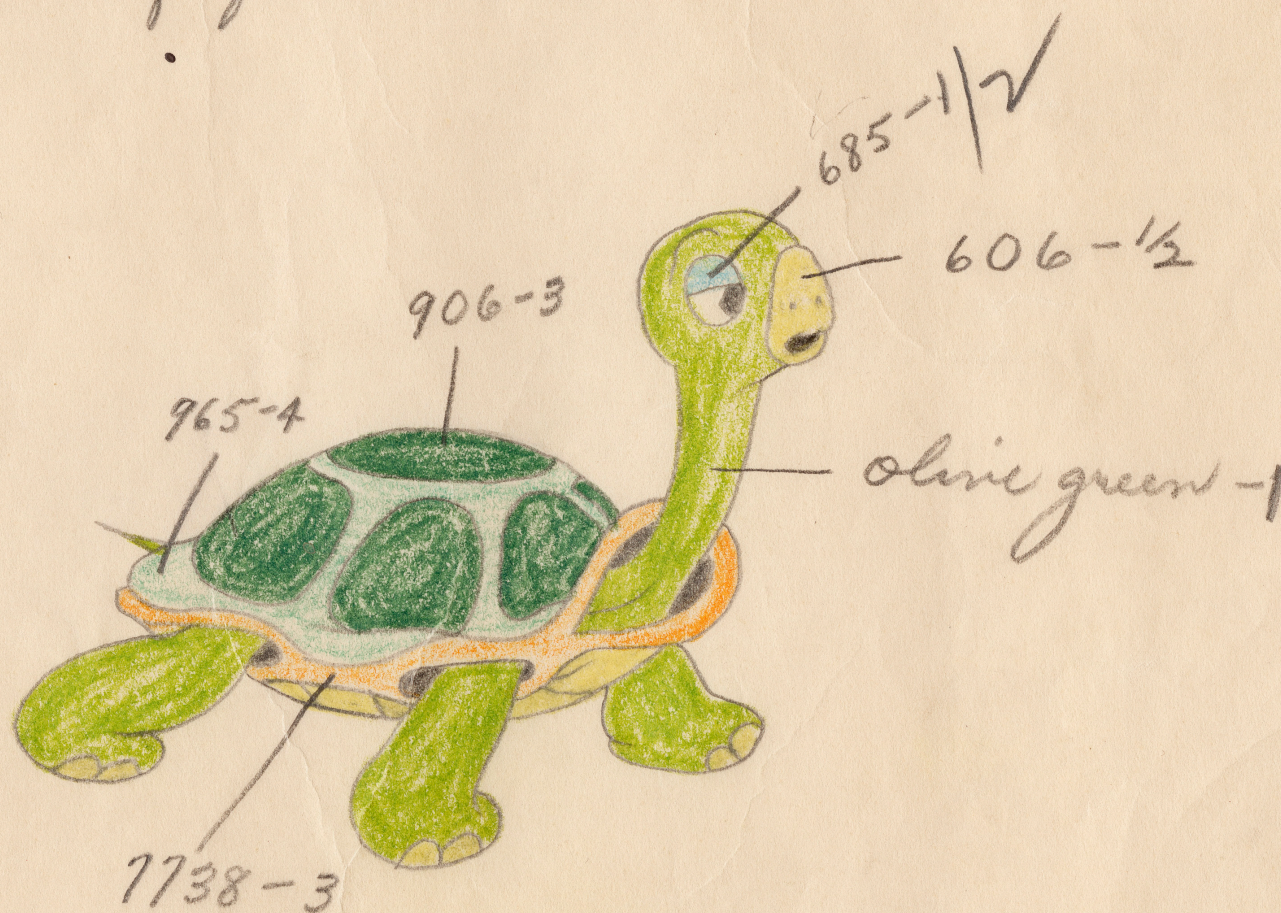
Too, some of the devices in this sequence could be traced to earlier Disney shorts. In *Alice in the Jungle* (1925) and in *The Castaway* (1931), first Julius the cat and then Mickey Mouse had discovered that what they thought were harmless fallen logs were actually hungry alligators. *Snow White* reversed the illusion: here the terrors *were* logs and other harmless objects, but the fright in Snow White’s mind must be vividly projected to the audience—yet still understood as imaginary. “When she hits the branches in back, she disturbs them,” Walt said at one conference, “and that is what

makes them start to move, and she imagines that they are hands. We have to watch that they don’t come to life, but just have them do like bramble bushes do that could catch on her dress.”

The climactic montage was discussed, dissected, and analyzed in minute detail. Some artists felt that the escalating series of terrors should be separated by quick dissolves; others argued for rapid cuts. Walt left both possibilities open: “They are all short, fast blends. You can overlap, too, and get some double exposure stuff . . . Work it out that way and it can easily be reshot in straight cuts.”

Like the other part of the sequence, this section went into production while still in an experimental stage, the better to test multiple ideas and see which ones were most effective on the screen. “The montage I want to shoot in black and white,” said Walt, “rehearse it and then shoot it in color, or even shoot it in color as a test. I plan on shooting that twice, not inking and painting but shooting it twice. I don’t know how you can do it otherwise. There are a lot of dissolves in there.” Studio records would later identify sequence 3A (along with 3B, 3C, and 3D) as jointly directed by Ham Luske and Perce Pearce, but in reality the crew remained very loosely organized, with no real leader other than Walt. “Some of the sequences don’t have a director,” Mike Holoboff noted at one meeting, “like with Larry [Morey]. He is more or less responsible, but he turns

Tongue - 426-1 $\frac{1}{2}$
 Bottom of feet - 7738-3



(normal)

A color callout for the slowest-moving member of Snow White's animal retinue.

Huntsman sequence. This provides a musical bridge into the first chorus of "With a Smile and a Song." Her dialogue about finding a place to sleep, trimmed to its bare essentials, is delivered in rhyme and functions as the "verse" of the song. Then comes the second chorus, played instrumentally on the soundtrack as the animals and birds lead Snow White through the forest.

As the sequence that introduces the animals, sequence 3B is also the film's earliest opportunity for the "animal men" to show what they can do. Eric Larson animated the birds, and his early work was so appealing that the scenes featuring proud parent birds and precocious baby bird were expanded: baby sings to Snow

White and shows off his vocal range; parents beam with pride until Junior embarrasses them by hitting a sour note. Bernard Garbutt animated key scenes of the deer, a specialty that he would develop in coming years. One of the fawn's actions during Snow White's song, animated by Milt Kahl, would later be singled out by critic Otis Ferguson in his review of the film: "shy but sniffing forward, then as she starts to pat it, the head going down, ears back, the body shrinking and tense, ready to bound clear; then reassurance, body and head coming up and forward to push against the hand—half a dozen motions shrewdly carried over from the common cat."

One animal character who makes his bow in this



sequence is the turtle. “I introduced the turtle character into the picture,” Grim Natwick recalled in later years. “I’d grown up on the Wisconsin River, and we used to catch turtles by the hundreds when we were kids. And in effect I was thinking of different animals and what they could do, and then I thought, hell, a turtle’d be kind of cute in here.” Natwick made his suggestion at a story conference in January 1936. The story men seized on the character’s possibilities, and turtle gags began to appear on the *Snow White* storyboards. Here, Walt suggested, as Snow White sings, “the turtle’s head could just come out of the weeds and listen, then back into shell.” It’s a modest introduction to a character who will become familiar later in the film.

As for Snow White herself, a single scene in this sequence—Snow White rising from a sitting position to her knees, then standing up, a technical challenge in animating the human form—was animated by Natwick. The rest of her scenes were the work of Ham Luske’s unit. But many artists worked in Luske’s unit at one time or another, and an unlikely name joins the ranks in sequence 3B. This sequence, alone in all the picture, offers an artistic mystery: did Ward Kimball—an animator known for wild, cartoony, slapstick action—animate some of the delicate, charming scenes of Snow White in the forest? Late in life he claimed more than once that he did, and production papers from this sequence seem to support his claim: his name doesn’t appear on the draft but does appear on some of the exposure sheets—suggesting that he was not originally assigned to those scenes, but worked on them after the

drafts were typed. Six scenes, some of them closeups, are candidates for Kimball’s work. In view of all the Kimball animation that was eventually cut from *other* sequences in the picture, this is worth mentioning. The scenes in question don’t differ greatly from most of the other Luske-dominated scenes in the feature⁶² and, in any case, are a far cry from Kimball’s usual forte. But then, *many* artists stretched beyond their usual limits in the making of *Snow White*.

One effect in this sequence was supplied by an unusual device. A stream runs through Snow White’s forest, and in two scenes the water in this stream has a distinctive appearance—dark, tranquil, gently flowing. Both the scenes in question were shot on the multiplane. The “water” in these scenes was a sheet of highly polished tin, mounted at an angle to the contact planes, positioned to reflect Snow White and the animals as they moved above, with “flow” lines scored in it, and drawn through the scene frame by frame. Walt was impressed with this striking effect and sought other ways to use it in the picture. During story work on sequence 2A, in which Snow White meets the Prince in the garden, he suggested that tin might be used either for Snow White’s distorting mirror or for the water in the wishing well.⁶³ But the mirror was eliminated from sequence 2A altogether, and in the end the reflections in the wishing well were photographed through a standard distortion glass, augmented by specially animated ripples.

The fawn’s action, as suggested in these story sketches, remained in the scene as animated by Milt Kahl.

Overleaf: A preliminary concept painting of the Dwarfs’ cottage by Sam Armstrong.

⁶² It’s true that some individual drawings in the closeups vary slightly from the Luske standard—but so slightly that the difference is imperceptible onscreen, and may be nothing more than an inker having a bad day. In one of these closeups (scene 12B, Snow White saying “I’m so ashamed of the fuss I’ve made”), the girl’s teeth have an odd appearance in some individual frames, but this again seems to be simply an anomaly in painting the cels.

⁶³ Walt made these comments early in June 1937. He was clearly inspired by seeing the first stream scene in sequence 3B, which was photographed around the same time in June 1937, one of the earliest multiplane scenes to be shot for *Snow White*.







“That was kind of a tragic period in my animation life,” he recalled wryly in later years.

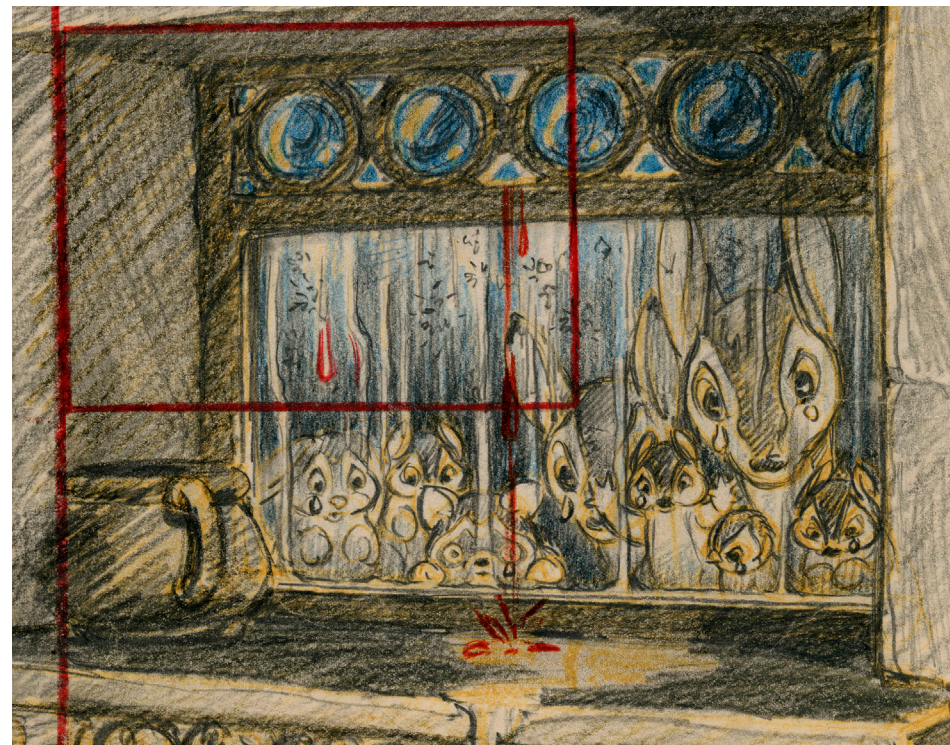
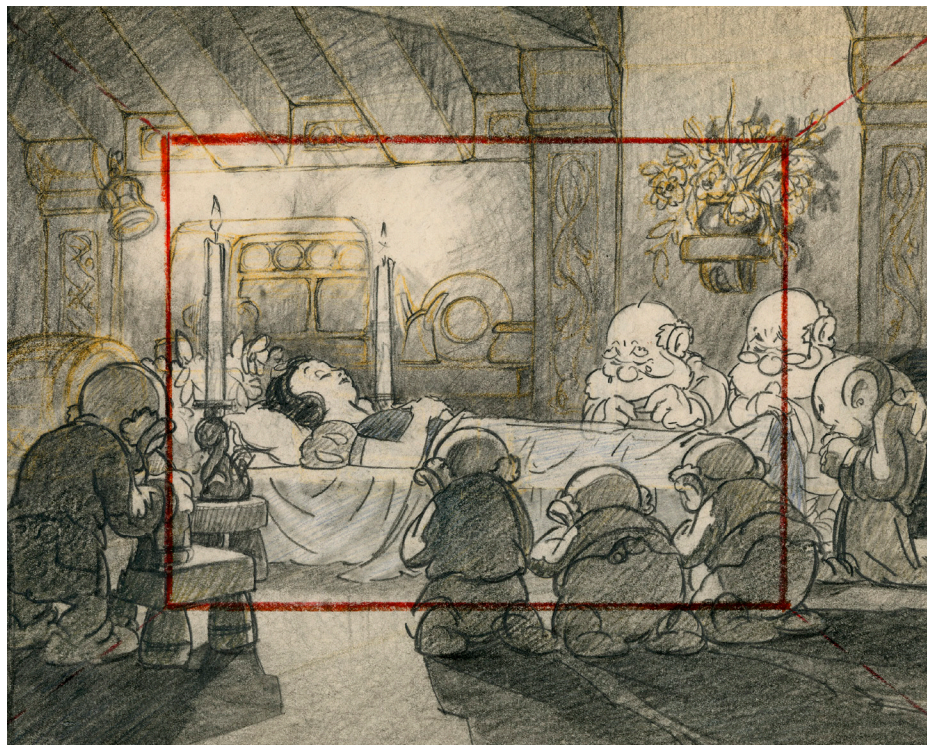
Much of the animation for sequence 11B had also been completed before this section was scrapped. Five decades later, surviving pencil animation was combined with story sketches to “reconstruct” the Lodge Meeting and Bed-Building sequences as bonus chapters for the *Snow White* laserdisc and, later, the DVD.¹⁰⁵ Today’s *Snow White* enthusiast can view these passages as a fascinating sidebar to the story of the film.

As with the Soup sequence, it’s easy to see through hindsight that the cutting of these sequences benefits the overall flow of *Snow White*. If anything, Walt’s reasoning is easier to understand in this instance: at this point in the film we’ve seen the Queen/Witch brewing the poisoned apple, we’ve seen her on her way to kill Snow White, and suspense is beginning to build—suspense that would surely be diluted by the dwarfs’ extended bed-building comedy. The tradeoff, here and in the Soup sequence, is that we lose nuances of character development in the dwarfs. Bashful’s observation in the Bedroom sequence, that Snow White looked “just like a angel,” had originally been the beginning of a full-fledged obsession. Here, when the dwarfs determined to build a bed, Bashful was to volunteer excitedly to carve angels on the frame, asking Doc: “Big angels or little angels?” Doc, preoccupied with something else, would answer: “Both.” Bashful would next be seen

chiseling the images of angels on the wooden bed frame, using a squirrel or rabbit as a model, leaves affixed to its back to suggest wings. Similarly, Dopey’s unused scenes in sequence 11B, stalking one dwarf after another and pilfering their shirttails, suggest a mischievous side of his personality that we rarely see in the finished film. And Sleepy’s knack for suggesting ingenious ideas, then sleepily forgetting what he had said, was to be illustrated here too. When he suggested building a bed, the other dwarfs were to seize on the idea: “A bed! That’s it! A bed!” Whereupon Sleepy would rouse himself and ask drowsily: “A bed?” Dave Hand commented at one meeting: “That’s why I wonder if it might not be well to include Sleepy in this section. We have cut him out of everything.”

More Dopey mischief:
stealing shirttails for a
patchwork quilt.

¹⁰⁵ This reconstruction, like that of the Bedroom Fight in sequence 5A, was carried out in 1987 by the Disney studio’s Dave Pacheco on the occasion of the film’s fiftieth anniversary. Unlike the Soup sequence or the Bedroom Fight, sequences 11A and 11B were abandoned before animation had been completed, and the surviving fragments have a raw, unfinished quality that gives them an added measure of interest today. For example, Kimball’s scene of Doc saying “Covered with fancy filigree” is only partially animated, without inbetweens. For the version preserved on the laserdisc and DVD, the rediscovered demo soundtracks were used where possible, the remaining audio newly recorded or improvised from miscellaneous music tracks. Although “Dig Dig Dig” had been planned in 1937 as musical underscoring for the bed-building action, the laser/DVD version substituted some instrumental tracks from the “Silly Song” instead.



usual. “Ham [Luske] thought perhaps there were parts of the face moving which wouldn’t move,” read one sweat-box note, “said the eyes could stay where they were and the eyebrows take the extreme drop; he thought the head tilts should stay as they are. Fred [Moore] suggested that instead of hitting the extreme at the bottom, you hit it halfway or a third of the way down, then inbetween from there down. Modify the action, anyway. Also slow down the tears. The welling up of the tears in the eyes should be slower.” The effects artists, animating the tears as they ran down the dwarfs’ faces, came in for the same scrutiny: “Get more roundness in the tears; bring out the highlight and don’t let the tears be so blue. Don’t get so much contrast between the water in the eye and the eyeball as was shown in the color test.”

As the dwarfs watch over Snow White inside the house, the animals and birds, animated by Milt Kahl, are keeping their own vigil outside in the rain. (Considering the tarnished reputation of the Silly Symphony *The Goddess of Spring*, it’s worth noting that Walt commended the mourning animals in that short as a model for their counterparts here.) All of this is underscored by Frank Churchill’s “Chorale for Snow White,” played on a reedy organ.

The scenes of the grief-stricken dwarfs and animals give way to a transitional sequence that bridges the change of seasons, and Snow White’s interment in the glass coffin, in a series of intertitles. Like everything else in the film, these titles were carefully analyzed by Walt. Dorothy Ann Blank was assigned to write them, and Walt continually pressed for brevity, urging Blank to

express the story points with a minimum of words. Otto Englander suggested the title background we see in the film, a classically simple composition of blank sky punctuated by a single tree branch, which would convey the changing seasons by falling leaves, blowing snow, and budding blossoms. At the May 1937 story conference, where Walt had considered dropping the scenes of the mourning dwarfs, he was—in his effort to simplify this part of the picture—similarly prepared to sacrifice the titles. “Suppose you left out the titles and . . . faded in on the snow falling. From that dissolve into a spring effect and then dissolve into the coffin and pick up without any titles.”

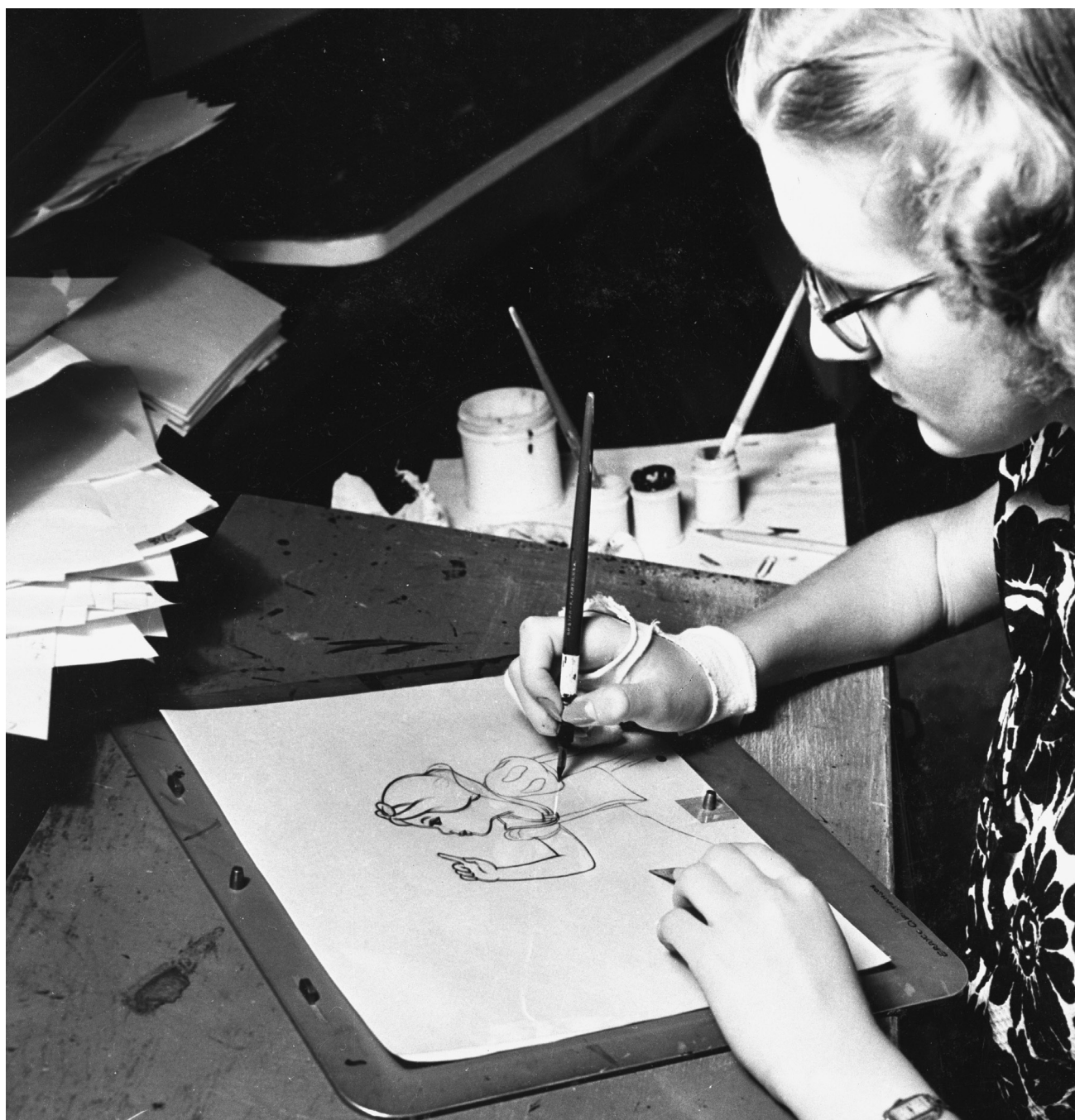
But again it was clear that Walt and the rest of the team preferred to retain the titles; they would simply have to be as understated as possible. The day after the meeting Dorothy Blank submitted her text—then continued to revise it for several days as Walt insisted on fewer and fewer words. Blank’s four titles were conflated to three, and Walt personally rewrote the third one before the final lettering began, reducing it to its essence. The result is an elegantly simple passage, with the economy and grace of the best silent-film titles, bridging the transition into the forest scenes:

. . . so beautiful, even in death, that the dwarfs could not find it in their hearts to bury her . . .

. . . they fashioned a coffin of glass and gold, and kept eternal vigil at her side . . .

. . . the Prince, who had searched far and wide, heard of the maiden who slept in the glass coffin.

The Dwarfs inside the house, and the animals outside, mourn Snow White in these story sketches. The camera move suggested in the sketch at left was replaced by a shifting-focus effect in the finished film.



An inker carefully traces a Snow White cel in 1937.

hub of the L-shaped production building. “And the room was on an angle with Walt’s room,” he recalled, “a right angle, so he could look into my window and I could look into his window. And of course I worked very hard!”

Particularly hard-pressed during this frenzied time were the ink and paint department and the camera department. These were the final links in the chain of production, and with every delay at earlier stages, the pressure on these departments was increased. The inkers and painters were given unexpected relief in October: the addition of new help. The Harman-Ising cartoon studio, which had been releasing its cartoons through MGM, suddenly lost its distribution contract.

Desperately trying to keep their studio afloat, Hugh Harman and Rudy Ising turned to Walt, their friend and former employer, for help; this was the situation that led Walt to subcontract production of the Silly Symphony *Merbabies* to them. The first step in this cooperative enterprise, however, was the loan of Harman and Ising’s entire ink and paint staff to the Disney studio to help finish *Snow White*. The new inkers and painters reported for work on Monday, the 4th of October; by this time the department was working round-the-clock shifts, as were some of the studio’s other departments. The lights on Hyperion Avenue burned brightly far into the night.

Late in the summer, a screening of the complete

concern, not Walt's, but *Snow White* had already cost far more than anyone had expected and was continuing to run up heavy expenses, and Walt was now being forced to consider the financial aspect of his picture. Roy had approached the Bank of America on three separate occasions since 1935 for large loans to complete the film, and when yet another infusion of cash was needed in the fall of 1937, Roy prevailed on Walt to show his work-in-progress to the bank's Joe Rosenberg. Walt was apprehensive. In later years he explained to Pete Martin that Rosenberg, still new to the film business, had prepared for the *Snow White* screening by asking around for advice on this Disney matter and had received discouraging replies from some Hollywood insiders. (One notable exception was producer Walter Wanger, a friend of Walt's who had believed in the *Snow White* venture from the start.¹⁴) On 11 September, the day of the screening, Walt wryly recalled, "Roy didn't show up . . . just the two of us sat in this big projection room." As the still-uncompleted film unreeled, Walt sat next to Rosenberg, nervously explaining away the gaps and rough edges that appeared onscreen. After the finish he walked Rosenberg to his car, waiting in an agony of suspense for the banker's verdict. "He talked about everything but the picture . . . He started talking about the weather and he was [saying] he had to get somewhere." Finally Rosenberg reached his car and got in. "He says, 'That thing is going to make a hatful of money,' and he drove off . . . That's all he said, 'This thing is going to make a hatful of money.'" The loan was promptly approved.

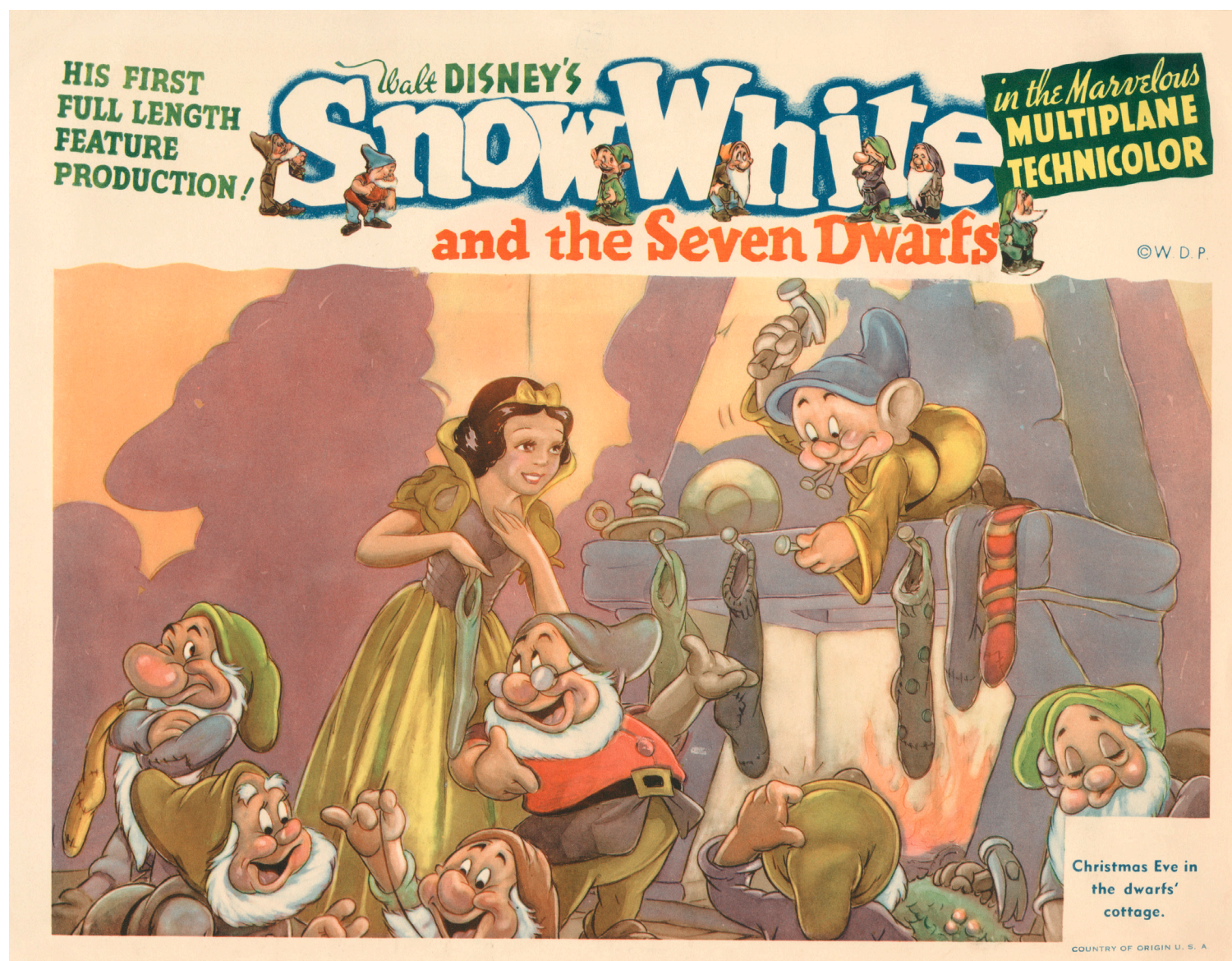


THE BANK OF AMERICA AND THE GIANNINI BROTHERS

During production of *Snow White*, Walt and Roy Disney were drawn increasingly into the orbit of another remarkable pair of brothers, the Gianninis. The rise of Amadeo Peter "A.P." Giannini and his banking empire is one of the great American success stories. From modest beginnings in San Francisco in 1904, he rose quickly through a combination of toughness, intuitive skill, and innovative thinking. By the early 1930s, through his efforts, the Bank of America had become one of the largest banks in the world. Giannini's rapid rise and success were remarkable, but equally noteworthy was his continuing concern for the middle class. His initial expansion had been based on small loans to California fruit growers and other clients that most banks regarded as poor credit risks. Throughout his career he continued to champion these "small borrowers," and thus played an important role in bringing banking services within the reach of ordinary Americans.

His younger brother, Attilio Henry "A.H." Giannini, had a more direct bearing on Walt's and Roy's fortunes. A.H. began his career in medicine but changed professions in 1909 to join his brother's banking empire. Almost immediately he challenged another banking convention by making loans to the motion-picture industry. His involvement with the movies increased during the 1910s and 1920s, and by 1928, "Doc" Giannini was such a fixture in the film business that the AMPA awarded him its Sam Harris cup "for the best suggestion or deed in promoting a spirit of goodwill and cooperation between the public and the film industry." Walt could hardly have been unaware of this highly publicized ceremony; it was held at New York's Biltmore Hotel on 20 November 1928—two days after the opening of *Steamboat Willie* at the Colony Theater.

Shortly after this, the younger Giannini returned to his home base in Los Angeles, where he became even more involved in financing film production, at the Disney studio and others. He established a friendly rapport with Walt and Roy, becoming yet another important "Doc" in Walt's life. It was Giannini's friendship with the Disneys that initially paved the way for financing of *Snow White*, and when he resigned from the Bank in 1936 to become president of United Artists, his successor, Joe Rosenberg, continued to approve the extended loan. "The Doc's been more than a banker to the movies," Walt told a journalist. "Everybody in Hollywood's cried on his shoulder."

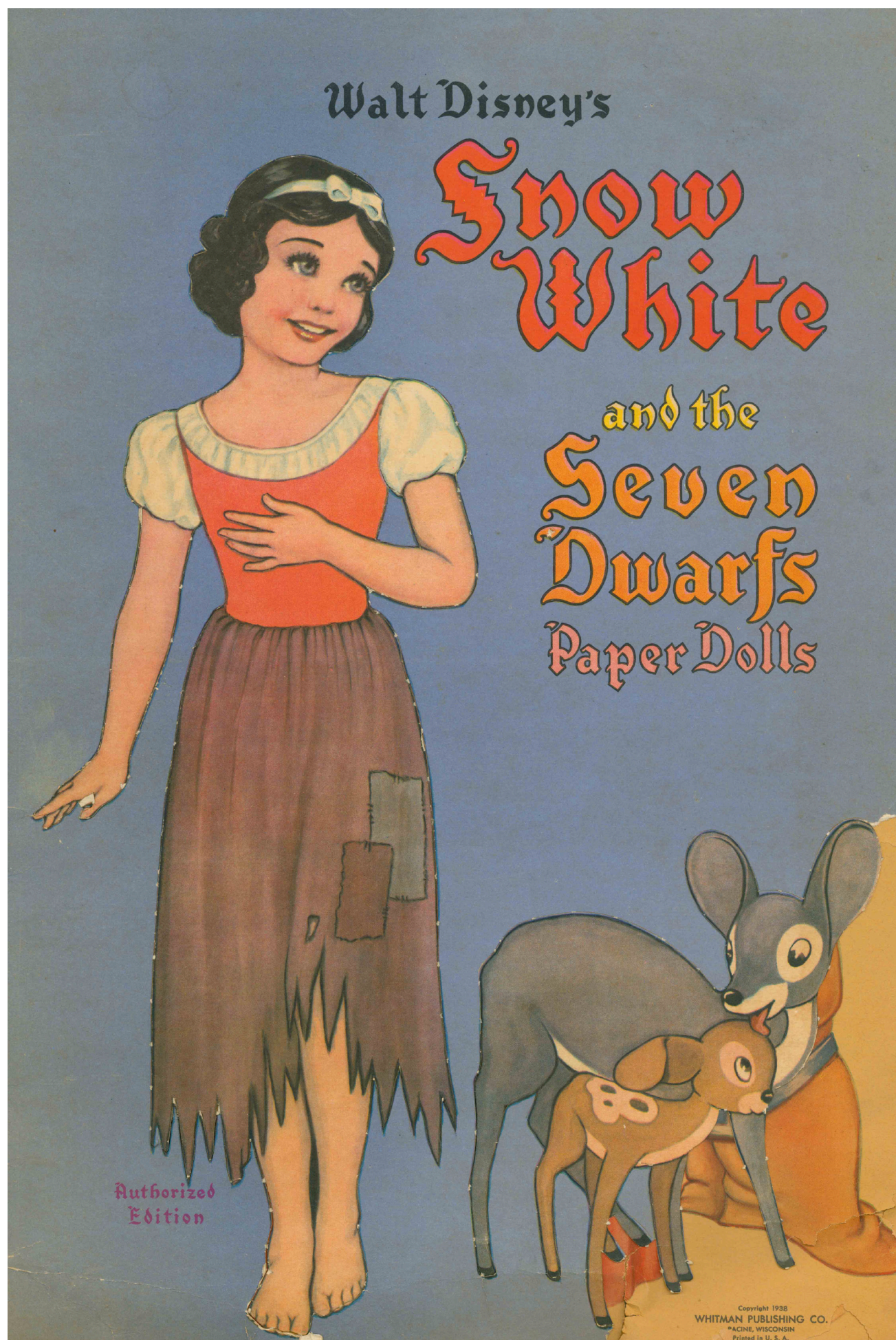


exquisite.” “It is a masterpiece of entertainment for people of every age,” said the *Hollywood Reporter*. *Daily Variety* exulted: “*Snow White* is the genius of craftsmanship which can make an endless series of line drawings and color washes so eloquent in human expression and trouble and antic joy, so potent in evoking audience emotion, laughter, excitement, suspense, tears. Yes, indeed—tears!” Other reviewers chimed in, vying with each other for superlatives. The paying customers echoed their fervent enthusiasm, thronging to the Carthay Circle box office, and would continue to pack the theater to capacity in the coming weeks and months. *Snow White* was not only a success, but a vast, overwhelming success; more than that, a milestone that would leave a lasting mark on film history.

For Walt Disney, this was a turning point. During the previous decade, he had achieved worldwide recognition as the creator of a fascinating and delightful new form of entertainment—but always within a prescribed

niche. Thanks to his efforts, the cartoon short was no longer as disparaged as it had once been, but it was still a supplement, an adjunct, an outbuilding separate from the main arena. Now, suddenly, Walt had moved to the center of the arena and had made it his own, in a unique, original, and thoroughly beguiling way. If critics and audiences had been amused and charmed by his earlier shorts, they were utterly enthralled by *Snow White*—and they couldn’t get enough of it. This was the doorway to further and seemingly unlimited conquests. In the years to come, Walt would experience a wildly varying series of ups and downs, triumphant successes balanced by setbacks and sometimes heartbreaking personal disappointments. But in December 1937 he was on top of the world. For four years he had stubbornly clung to his dream, and now it had come true—and the whole world happily surged forward to share in it.

No such scene as this was ever planned for the film, but the marketing forces, anticipating a Christmas opening, cannily produced this image for one of the film’s promotional lobby cards.



Some of the publications blurred the line between storybooks and toys, such as this book of paper dolls.



Marguerite Clark, whom Walt had seen as Snow White in the Paramount film nearly three decades earlier, visits him at the studio.

Brandt's Manhattan, on Broadway, only a few blocks away from Radio City—and continued there for three months. Once again, long lines at the box office testified to *Snow White's* enduring appeal. Bosley Crowther, in the *New York Times*, offered a poignant wartime perspective: “Can it be six years since this picture was first taken out of its box, all new and full of wonder and infinite surprise? Can it be six years since we first came to know those incomparable dwarfs? . . . We felt good and sublimely complacent when the dwarfs sang us ‘Whistle While You Work.’ Who’d have thought that this jovial little ditty was destined to become a war-plant song? What kill-joy dreamed that American draftees would soon be marching to ‘Hi-Ho, Hi-Ho’?”

“Destiny has its way, regardless of feelings and fairy tales. And now we are in the midst of warfare more deadly than the gravest man conceived. Yet there, at the Manhattan Theatre, the dwarfs are still whistling while they work. Snow White is still dreaming of Prince Charming. And Dopey is still getting underfoot . . . There is evidence in this revival that such a masterwork on the screen has the timeless and universal richness of classic music or lore. Its pleasures are forever diverting; their recapture is a refreshing delight. There is even an elemental premium to be enjoyed at this particular time in seeing the Old Witch destroyed by a fortuitous but inevitable device. And there is more than fictitious satisfaction in the evidence that the Prince finally returns . . . Also, we would like to inform you that it is

deeply encouraging today to hear a theatre full of children laughing as though the world were new.”

These were not isolated sentiments; across the country, *Snow White* continued to evoke a delighted response from audiences. The personal appearances by Disney talent continued: three touring units—one featuring Caselotti and Colvig, a second featuring Nash and Mitchell, and a third with another troupe of seven masked “dwarfs”—continued to appear onstage throughout the U.S. and Canada well into June. And *Snow White*, which had opened in Cincinnati in February 1944, continued to play in some American cities as late as October.

Meanwhile, just as in 1938, the film's promotional campaign produced some odd new sidelights on the *Snow White* story. Some could be heard in a new wave of *Snow White*-related radio broadcasts, most of them authorized by the Disney studio. Edgar Bergen, who had “hosted” *Snow White* and the dwarfs on his own program in December 1937, was himself a guest on the *Screen Guild Players* broadcast in April 1944, where he claimed that he himself had been asked to play the Prince, and proceeded to tell the story of *Snow White* to Charlie McCarthy. This was a very loose abridgement of the story, allowing plenty of time for Charlie's signature wisecracks. The only member of the film's original voice cast to appear in this broadcast was Billy Gilbert as Sneezy. As a result, Sneezy and Bashful—played by Bergen himself with his Mortimer Snerd voice—were



strains of “Whistle While You Work” can be heard in the show’s opening music, while “Some Day My Prince Will Come” can be heard at the end. Walt’s television debut makes it clear that *Snow White* was not just a relic of the past, but continued to play a vital part in the Disney studio’s image.

The Walt Disney Christmas Show

25 DECEMBER 1951, CBS

One Hour in Wonderland was a tremendous success with viewers, and the Disney studio created a second Christmas Day special for the following year. The sponsor of the 1951 program was Johnson & Johnson, and the format was similar to that of the previous year’s show—but this time the film being promoted was *Snow White* itself, due for its second major reissue the following February.

Edgar Bergen and his dummies did not return for this program; instead the show opens in the children’s ward of a hospital, where the patients are treated to a visit, via television, to another party at the Disney studio. Kathryn Beaumont and Bobby Driscoll, who had appeared in the previous year’s show, are on hand again, this time in their capacities as character voices (Wendy and Peter, respectively) in the Disney work-in-progress *Peter Pan*. The magic mirror is back, too, displaying

clips from such Disney shorts as *The Band Concert* and *Donald and Pluto*. But the focus is on *Snow White*. This program features an international flavor; the guests at the “party” are children from around the world who request and receive *Snow White* clips in their native languages: English, French, Polish, Swedish, Danish, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Czech. Hindustani doesn’t seem to be available, so the mirror fills in with a Hindustani clip from *Bambi* instead.¹³⁸

Toast of the Town

8 FEBRUARY 1953, CBS

This episode of Ed Sullivan’s early-1950s television series was framed as a tribute to Walt Disney, and was supported by Walt, who appeared on camera in an interview setting with Sullivan. Their scripted reminiscences of Walt’s career were liberally illustrated with clips from Disney films. Similar clips had already been seen on Walt’s own Christmas specials and would later become a regular feature of his *Disneyland* series, but this broadcast, predating *Disneyland* by a year and a half, was still a notable early appearance of vintage Disney animation on TV. In the program Walt discusses *Snow White* with Sullivan, shows a clip from the feature, and, as a bonus, explains and includes the dwarfs’ return appearance in *The Winged Scourge*.

Left: Sharon Disney, Charlie McCarthy, Edgar Bergen, Mickey Mouse, Walt, and Diane Disney with Walt’s miniature locomotive, the Lilly Belle, on the set of One Hour in Wonderland (1950).

Right: Kathryn Beaumont, in her new role as Wendy in Peter Pan, returns for the 1951 Christmas program.

¹³⁸ This shrewd bit of showmanship highlights an experiment in which Walt and the studio took special pride. At the end of the war, as the Disney studio sought to reestablish itself in the international market, a special edition of *Bambi* had been prepared for India. Besides offering dialogue dubbed in Hindustani, this version replaced the original musical score with native Indian music. The soundtrack had been recorded in Bombay under Jack Cutting’s supervision, and this special edition of the film had earned the studio a special Golden Globe award.





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